RURAL SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENTS WIEGH TRAINING OPTIONS

TECHNOLOGY CREATES TRAINING ALTERNATIVES

By

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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Rural sheriff's departments usually consist of no more than 50 sworn personnel. They can be huge in geographic area, but small in the size of the permanent population they serve. In California, examples of small rural sheriff's departments are; Alpine County Sheriff's Department[1], Mono County Sheriff's Department[2], and the Inyo County Sheriff's Department[3]. These counties range from 3,003[4] to 10,412[5] square miles each; however their sheriff's departments have very little access to the advanced training centers found in larger metropolitan areas. This results in the reality that personnel must be sent away for basic and advanced training, although things are changing. An accompanying reality, though, is that these agencies are often the furthest from training offerings, and are also the ones who can least afford that journey. The good news is that virtual kinesthetic law enforcement training will provide small rural sheriff's departments the ability to train their personnel in an effective, cost efficient manner without the cost and headaches of their absence.

Background

California's rural sheriff's departments have existed since the founding of the State in 1850. Of the 58 counties, 30 are primarily rural. Each agency varies in specific size and priorities; although, since the creation of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in 1959, the standards for hiring, certification and training of sworn personnel

[1] Alpinesheriff.org (2010)
[2] Monosheriff.org (2010)
[3] Inyosheriff.org (2011)
[4] Monosheriff.org (2010)
[5] Inyosheriff.org (2011)

is essentially the same for all other policing agencies in the state[6]. This has been a boon to the goal of creating and sustaining great professional standards; however, it does come at a price. POST is a voluntary program, though, and is incentivized through the reimbursement of expenses for trainees and the development of best-practice standards and training courses. In recent years, however, monies once reimbursed for legislated or mandated training have dried up[7].

While the funding for training sworn personnel has dropped dramatically, legislated training mandates have increased[8]. Today's officer must attend 26 weeks of intensive training from a POST certified academy before even becoming a law enforcement officer in the state of California. This training a recruit trains in numerous areas as outlined by POST. This training includes weaponless defense, driver training, impact weapons, vehicle code, penal code, law of arrest, and on and on. This training qualifies them to hold the position of police officer, or deputy sheriff in the state of California. However, it is just the beginning of the training that they must receive throughout their law enforcement career. In California, peace officers have mandated biannual training, with additional time devoted to training for a number of specialized functions. This has several consequences. If local training is not available, a department can spend significant funds to send officers to training. They also incur hard and soft-dollar costs in terms of lost duty hours, replacing absent personnel and overtime costs for others to fulfill required duties.

A number of presenters (including POST) have moved some training to online modes, but the majority of peace officer training remains an activity requiring the trainee's presence.

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[6] *Professional Administrative Manual* (2007), POST
[7] Post.ca.gov
[8] Professional Administrative Manual (2011), POST

This is especially true for learning domains where performance of physical skills is requisite. The emerging opportunity is to use alternate means for this type of training, and to capitalize on advances in technology to deliver the necessary skills to the target population. Emerging virtual training technology, especially that for the kinesthetic training needs of peace officers, will allow rural agencies to provide their personnel with never-before experienced opportunities.

The best teacher

In law enforcement, experience may be the best teacher, but in real life, police officers may not get a chance to learn from their mistakes. To survive, they must receive training that prepares them for what they might encounter on the street. Because many training programs emphasize repetition to produce desired behaviors, they may or may not achieve the intended result in disciplines that require thought and adjustment once the student leaves the training environment. Thus, the more realistic the training, the greater the lessons learned[9]. Unfortunately, in more remote agencies, it is difficult to sustain the expertise needed to put officers and deputies through these complex training protocols. In spite of these issues, rural agencies must still comply with state standards for training and proficiency.

Rural sheriff's departments across California are faced with the challenge of providing continued training and education to members of their respective departments. These challenges are magnified by the fact these types of departments are small, and often have little or no access to local POST-approved training providers. The problems of bringing training to these departments are financial, geographic, as well as systemic. Alternatives have surfaced, but they still are short of providing the necessary outcomes for officer training.

[9] Hormann, Jeffrey S. (1995) *Virtual reality: the future of law enforcement training*. The FBI law Enforcement Bulletin. July 1, 1995

Today we have online training, either podcasted in a classroom, with students, and teachers in a different locale. Options for online training include synchronous meetings or downloaded course segments to allow individual students to attend classes at their convenience. This is a relatively new phenomenon, made possible by the proliferation of personal computers, and access to the Internet. This type of continuing education, though, has its limitations. It is not a great way for kinesthetic domains (those involved with physical movement or skills) to be taught. There are, however, emerging mean to accommodate the needs of kinesthetic learners, and rural sheriff's departments are ideal candidates to take advantage of these modalities for continuing education and training.

How we learn

People all learn in different ways, most normally preferring an emphasis in one of three way of acquiring new information; auditory, visual or kinesthetic means. An auditory learner learns by listening; a visual learner is someone who learns by watching, and a kinesthetic learner learns by hands-on work and engaging in activities[10]. In truth, we all have a capacity to learn in each of these ways, but we also tend to prefer one means over another. It is simple to figure out which type of learning modality is best suited for online classes. The visual learner will have a far easier time in traditional web-based training. An auditory learner may also succeed, as long as the classes have an auditory component to them. The problem remains of how you teach a kinesthetic learner, a learner who has to act, or move to learn. The problem is intensified for all learners in areas where physical skills are requisite to the learning intended.

[10] Clark, Lynn (2006) *Today's Learner.* Harper Collins, New York, New York

In law enforcement, experience may be the best teacher, but in real life, police officers may not get a chance to learn from their mistakes. To survive, they must receive training that prepares them for most situations they might encounter on the street. However, because many training programs emphasize repetition to produce desired behaviors, they may not achieve the intended result, especially after students leave the training environment. Thus, the more realistic the training, the greater the lessons learned[11].

Law enforcement has proven over time that the best way for officers to learn many necessary skills is by allowing them to actually performing it in a controlled setting[12]. Unfortunately, this type of training can be cost prohibitive, since trainers, training sites and students all have to be in the appropriate seating with the right training tools. Range training provides a glimpse into the problems facing departments, and their training staff. There are large costs involved in maintain a range facility, and numerous hazmat requirements relating to its' operation. Add to that personnel time and legislated mandates, and range training becomes a huge burden on departments and their resources. It is even more problematic for rural sheriff's departments, who face the challenges of geography, budget costs, and time and patrol coverage issues. Since the 1970's, policing has attempted to address these issues through the use of simulators, most notably for emergency vehicle operations and firearms training.

In 1980 law enforcement had the first simulators available outside of the military to teach emergency vehicle operations. The size of the simulators at the time ranged from 12' by 12' to almost the size of a house; however, they were revolutionary in that they showed the potential simulators had when it came to the use of an artificial environment as a training aid. Today, these

[11] Hormann, Jeffrey S. (1995) *Virtual reality: the future of law enforcement training*. The FBI law Enforcement Bulletin. July 1, 1995
[12] Training by Design, Part 2, JP Molnar, *Law Officer*, April/2009

driving simulators have advanced, and are now smaller machines that create a life-like simulation of police driving in a number of different situations. Today, MPRI is a leader in driving simulators[13]. They currently provide simulators for law enforcement and military applications. MPRI simulators include state-of-art visual systems, realistic cabs and vehicle instrumentation, motion-based system provide real road feel and response, icon-based trainer consoles, high fidelity tire force modeling and accurately simulated transmission[14]. The scenarios that unfold in these simulators can be manipulated by the push of a button. These simulators are modular and easily moved. MPRI type simulators are cutting edge and are just now coming into use. These new simulators are great, but very few if any rural sheriff's departments have access to them.

Along the lines of the driving simulators, law enforcement was one of the first groups to use Firearms Simulator Training Scenarios (FATS). They were first introduced into law enforcement training in the early 1980s. They were housed in a large room, and it was simply an officer standing in front of a projector screen interacting with a series of moving pictures. Today, FATS simulators are housed in mobile trailers, and or buildings. Within these FATS scenarios, an officer interacts with a series of virtual characters that interact back with the officer. This training has now evolved into "shoot, don't shoot training" in that an officer has to make "REAL TIME" choices, and must be able to make those decisions in a split second. The scenarios can then be stopped and replayed. They can be discussed, and they can be changed. The FATS trailers are available to rural sheriff's department, but are limited in that there are only several moving around the state of California, and they are only offered once a year. The training as

[13] www.mpri.com
[14] www.mpri.com

mandated for the FATS is only 4 hours[15]. This is simply not enough, but the ability for a department to own a FATS simulator is especially cost prohibitive for small rural sheriff's departments with limited budgets.

Advancements in technology have made more and more technologies a real world alternative. The Department of Defense has begun working on whole body suits that will allow participants to enter a virtual world. These suits will allow a person to feel his virtual environment[16]. The participant will don the suit and then simply plug in. He will be able to experience the sensations of touch, gravity, and pain, to name a few. Now imagine using this type of distance learning for defensive tactics training, impact weapons, or for firearms training. There would be no more real training than what can be had in the virtual world. The FATS, and driving simulators will be a thing of the past. All that will be required is a computer, a virtual world suit, and time. All of a sudden the training possibilities become only limited by time.

To address the logistical issues of distance and availability, CA POST has taken the first steps toward offering distance learning. This had been accomplished through the POST learning portal[17]. Of course, though, the officer can only use visual and auditory senses to complete the training offerings. The real hands on type of learning, kinesthetic learning still must be accomplished by actually attending class.

Virtual reality is the next logical step in distance learning. The University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) is revolutionizing learning through the development of interactive digital media. ICT produces virtual humans, computer training

[15] POST.CA.GOV (2009)
[16] Hormann, Jeffrey S. (1995) *Virtual reality: the future of law enforcement training*. The FBI law Enforcement Bulletin. July 1, 1995
[17] POST.CA.GOV (2009)

simulations and immersive experiences for decision-making, cultural awareness, leadership and health. ICT has also done extensive work with the military through the creation of the Virtual Reality Cognitive Performance Assessment Test (VRCPAT)[18]. The VRCPAT makes use of virtual environments to create a battery of neuropsychological measures to assess the ways in which the structure and function of the brain relate to specific psychological processes and overt behaviors: attention-vigilance, effort, abstraction-flexibility, executive functioning, spatial organization, visual-motor processing, processing speed, visual memory, verbal abilities, and verbal memory and learning. One effort in this direction is the use of virtual reality simulation of relevant military challenges. By recycling virtual graphic assets built for the combat tactical simulation training game, Full Spectrum Warrior and other ICT assets, the project is able to build a state of the art interactive/adaptive virtual Iraqi city[19].

Rural sheriff's departments must address the problems created by training mandates, which often result in budget shortfalls and personnel shortages. They must follow in the footsteps of what has already been accomplished; and virtual training is one plausible solution. These trainings can be changed and updated as the scenarios unfold, and have measurable outcomes. Their cost is minimal as compared to their benefit. Law enforcement, especially rural sheriff's departments, must think outside the box to find new solutions to old problems.

[18] www.ict.usc.edu
[19] www.ict.usc.edu